

# Yosemite National Park

## Planning Update

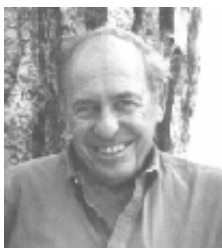
Volume 7, Summer 1997

*"Though of such stupendous depth, these canyons are not gloomy gorges, savage and inaccessible. With rough passages here and there they are flowery pathways conducting to the snowy, ice fountains; mountain streets full of life and light, graded and sculptured by the ancient glaciers, and presenting throughout their courses a rich variety of novel and attractive scenery - the most attractive that has yet been discovered in the mountain ranges of the world."*

John Muir, *The Yosemite*

Dear Friends of Yosemite,

The January flood created obstacles and problems for the park staff, visitors, and surrounding communities, and those have been frustrating to all of us. However, the opportunities for positive change in Yosemite, beginning in the near future, seems a reward worth the cost. As the Western Regional Director for several years, I have been very involved in Yosemite issues. I have dealt with the frustration of the status quo and want to seize this opportunity for change. I have watched the planning for the implementation of the 1980 General Management Plan evolve with great care and attention. I am—as I know you are—looking forward to moving the park into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with new momentum and visible progress toward achieving the goals that have been set for this wonderful park.



We owe a great deal of thanks to Congress, Secretary Babbitt and the administration for including funds for Yosemite's recovery within the recently enacted 1997 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act. With the support of the California delegation, the Interior Appropriations Subcommittees included the necessary funding allowing us to begin the task ahead. The support of you who care for Yosemite as we do is also very important to the process, and we are appreciative. You will be interested to know that additional funding has also been

approved to help resolve the transportation challenges in Yosemite Valley. Although progress has been made toward achieving the goals of the General management Plan since 1980, it has been a struggle because of limited funding. Now, with funding in hand, we can take advantage of the opportunities created by the flood...we can now take giant steps. But there is much work to do. Because of the large loss of accommodations at the Yosemite Lodge as a result of the flood, the National Park Service decided to remove the Lodge from the "umbrella" plan—the Valley Implementation Plan—and accelerate the comprehensive design for the complex. The plan underwent public review and many suggested changes have been incorporated into the design. The plan for the Lodge has now been approved and work may now begin.

As in the past, we value your input in our planning process and encourage you to feel free to participate by sending us your comments. The Valley Implementation Plan, the plan for the entire Yosemite Valley, is to be released for public comment in early fall. Our approach is one of flexibility, and we are striving to do the right thing in the very best way...for you and for future generations. We will continue to need your help, and we look forward to working with you.

Stanley T. Albright  
Acting Superintendent

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# Flood Recovery Update

As you are probably aware, during the first three days of 1997, Yosemite National Park's major rivers and tributaries flooded many park areas, causing severe damage to infrastructure. Damaged facilities included the four main routes leading into the park, major electrical, water and sewer systems, 439 units of employee housing, over 500 guest lodging units, over 350 campsites, 17 resource restoration projects and at least ten known archeological sites. Shortly after the water receded, we reported to you that the flood provided validation for the extensive planning efforts that have been ongoing since 1980. Many of the structures and facilities damaged or destroyed had already been damaged by much smaller floods, and this event underscored that we need to move facilities out of the flood plain. Most of all, we recognize that through the recovery effort we can make significant strides in implementing the 1980 General Management Plan.

On June 12, Congress passed the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill, which the President has signed into law. As part of this bill, over \$176 million is provided to fully cover the flood recovery projects in Yosemite. Projects are moving forward only after they have been tested against the park's 1980 General Management Plan and other supporting planning efforts. For example, one the largest recovery projects, the reconstruction of Yosemite Lodge, is now being undertaken after a supplementary plan and environmental assessment has been finalized (see accompanying article).

## Managing the Recovery Process

To manage the 350+ recovery projects, a temporary Flood Recovery Team has been created within the park. This team is responsible for the plan-

ning, design, repair or re-construction of damaged facilities. This is a small group of park professionals primarily composed of project managers and support staff. These managers will work with the National Park Service's Denver Service Center, Federal Highway Administration, and private architectural and engineering firms to plan and design projects. Contracting for

the repair and construction work is being done through a wide variety of procurement methods, both standard and innovative (such as "design/build" construction contracts).

## Making the Repairs

Recovery work has been progressing on schedule. Sequencing or scheduling of work has been underway since

*Silver Apron bridge before repair*



*Silver Apron bridge after repair*





January. It is important to remember that our construction work is subject to the whims of nature. Unlike many parts of California, Yosemite has several months of winter snows that are a major factor in construction schedules. For large, complex projects we expect that planning, impact analysis and design will take about one year, with construction lasting from one to three years. Many moderate-sized projects will be planned and designed in the same year and construction will occur in the following year. Smaller projects will require less planning and design with construction occurring in the same year. Here is a list of projects already accomplished or underway:

### **Roads**

Twelve projects have been completed since January, including emergency repairs to the Big Oak Flat Road, the El Portal Road, Hwy 120 and Hwy 41. The largest road project remaining is the reconstruction of the El Portal Road. Alternatives for this project have been presented for public review in an environmental assessment (see box). This project will be done under a three-year contract which will allow the road to remain open during much of the construction. Financial incentives will be included in the contract to reward an early completion of this project.

### **Trails**

Five front country trail bridge projects have been completed in Yosemite Valley. Twenty-six trail reconstruction projects are currently underway throughout the park.



### **Utilities**

All utility systems are functioning. Three high voltage electrical repairs and one major sewer line replacement have been completed. Nine other utility projects are currently underway. However, many long-term repairs, such as the Valley water distribution system, require professional design and will be constructed in phases. All repairs to utility systems are scheduled to be complete by the year 2000.

### **Buildings**

Seventeen building projects are currently in progress. Scheduled to be completed this year is the construction of temporary contact stations to accommodate traffic and visitor control during the next several years. The accompanying article discusses the work at Yosemite Lodge.

### **Grounds**

Again, due to floodplain issues, substantial design is required to adequately plan for the reconstruction of campgrounds. Campground repairs at Wawona and reconstruction of picnic areas at Cascades and Swinging Bridge should be finished by the end of the year. The Yosemite Valley campground replacement is a component of the Draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan and therefore dependent upon completion of that plan (expected May 1998). It is anticipated that 1999 will see the largest amount of construction taking place to reconstruct campgrounds in Yosemite Valley.

### **Natural Resources**

Sixteen revegetation and restoration projects are in progress. Previous riverbank stabilization areas that failed during the flood will be restabilized, and revegetation will begin next year and continue until the year 2003.

### **Cultural Resources**

Damaged archeological and historical site stabilization and protection are already underway. Stabilization is complete on one major project, a large El Portal village/cemetery site with ancient remains. The remaining work is expected to be complete by the year 2000.

### **Transportation**

Implementation of transportation facilities depends upon the outcome of the Draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan and regional transportation planning and implementation.

**Total funds expended on recovery projects as of July 21, 1997: \$19,579,589.**

### **Being Accountable**

We realize the importance of keeping all who care about Yosemite well informed about flood recovery. We are in the process of finalizing a Flood Recovery Action Plan which will be available in September. This will be updated annually to describe priorities and reexamine spending and scheduling projections. In addition, we will be producing a report of flood recovery planning and accomplishments which will be submitted to Congress at the end of each fiscal quarter beginning December of 1997. Finally, we will continue to publish these updates so that we keep you informed about the recovery effort and how it interrelates with other ongoing park initiatives.



# *The Yosemite Lodge*

In our Volume 4 Planning Update, we advised you that the impacts of the January flood on the Yosemite Lodge were greater than what the General Management Plan and the Concession Services Plan anticipated. Because of the loss of such a large number of lodging units and housing for employees that directly serve visitors, the National Park Service decided to accelerate specific planning for the Lodge and return it to full service as soon as possible. (See schedule)

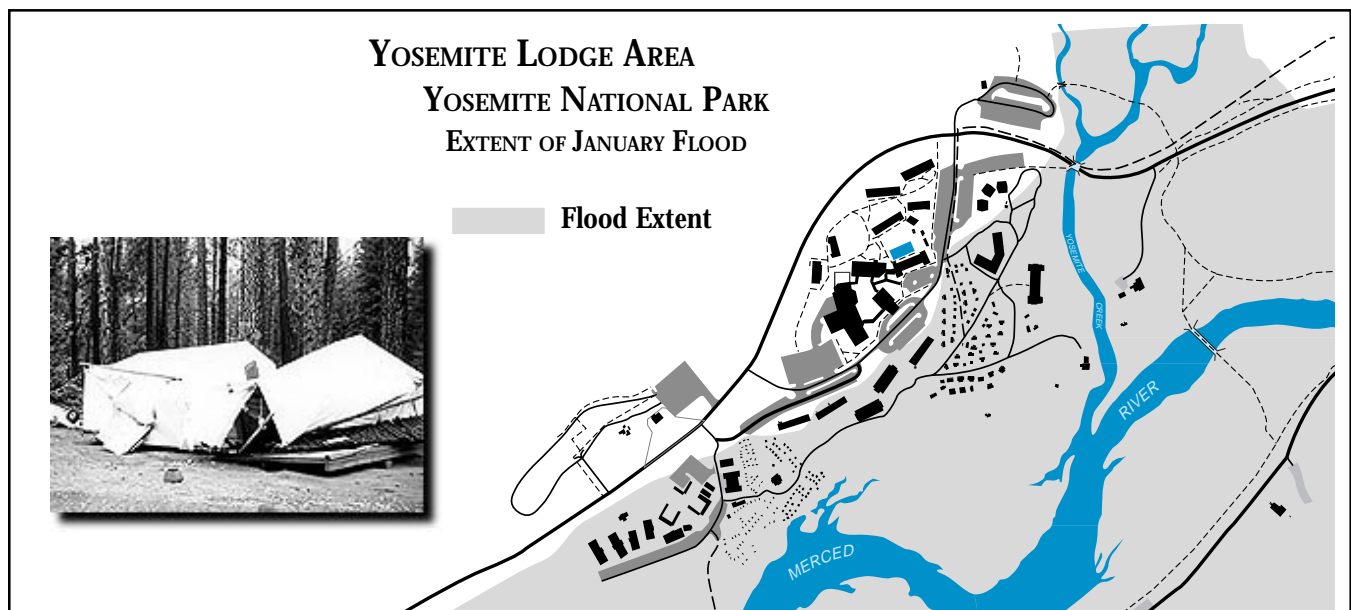
The Development Concept Plan for Yosemite Lodge, followed the specific direction of the 1992 Concession Services Plan EIS, which amended the GMP. The design was revised to move lodging and housing units out of the flood plain and a Draft Plan/Environmental Assessment was released on April 10, 1997, for a 30-day public comment period. In response to requests the public review period was extended for another seven days. The public review was widely announced in the media and on the World Wide Web, and included opportunities for weekly public walk-throughs of the Lodge site with park staff. Changes were then made to the design based on public input.

The Final Comprehensive Site Plan and the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) have been approved by Yosemite Superintendent Stanley Albright and Western Regional Director John Reynolds. (If you would like a copy of the FONSI feel free to write to the address on back.) Backed by the supplemental funding

to repair flood damage, which was recently approved by Congress and the President, the way is now clear to begin the removal of damaged structures, construction of new facilities, new circulation, and the restoration of previously impacted areas.

## **Among the actions included in the Development Concept Plan for Yosemite Lodge:**

- ❖ Construction of 252 new units, for a total of 440. This is a reduction in lodging by 55 from pre-flood conditions, as called for in the Concession Services Plan.
- ❖ Removal of lodging and employee housing from the flood plain. Both lodging and employee housing will be redesigned and relocated to sites previously impacted.
- ❖ Guest parking and vehicle circulation is redesigned and relocated, and a new pedestrian walkway will be located within the core of the Lodge complex.
- ❖ Bicycle and pedestrian trails are linked to the Lodge.
- ❖ The Lodge plan includes improvements to the Sunnyside Campground complex.
- ❖ Reduction of the "foot print" of development by creating fourplex structures to replace the removed cabins and consolidated housing in five 3-story structures.



## Changes made to the plan as a result of public input:

The footprint of the proposed project was reduced, increasing net habitat restoration from 0.5 to 2.9 acres. Several changes were made including the consolidation of three 2-story buildings into two 3-story buildings.

The buffer between employee housing and Sunnyside Campground (Camp 4) was increased by modifying the building layout and redesigning a parking lot.

A decision on the continued use of Northside Drive was deferred to the Valley Implementation Plan (release of the draft is forthcoming).

Other major issues of concern:

### ***Status of Sunnyside Campground (Camp 4)***

This campground will remain where it is, and efforts will be made to improve design and facilities on the site (through funds other than flood recovery appropriations).

### ***Fragmented planning***

The NPS prefers consolidated planning, but the situation required a plan for the lodge to be developed quickly. We consulted with many interested parties, and found assurances that they would work with us. That effort has been appreciated, and we will continue to work with interested parties on all planning processes.

### ***Maintain lodging mix***

Per the 1992 Concession Services Plan/EIS, the lodge will offer motel, cottage and cabin units with an equitable mix of economy and mid-scale rooms.

### ***Eliminating separate cabins***

The proposal adopts the approach of the Concession Services Plan/EIS, to move toward quadplex units.

### ***Handicap Access***

Universal design principles will be used to make most lodging units accessible, and to exceed the American's with Disabilities Act requirements.

### ***Eliminating Pine Cottage***

Pine Cottage flooded as much as 8 feet and will be removed. Pine Cottage features were identified as desirable and will be factored into the design of the new cottages.

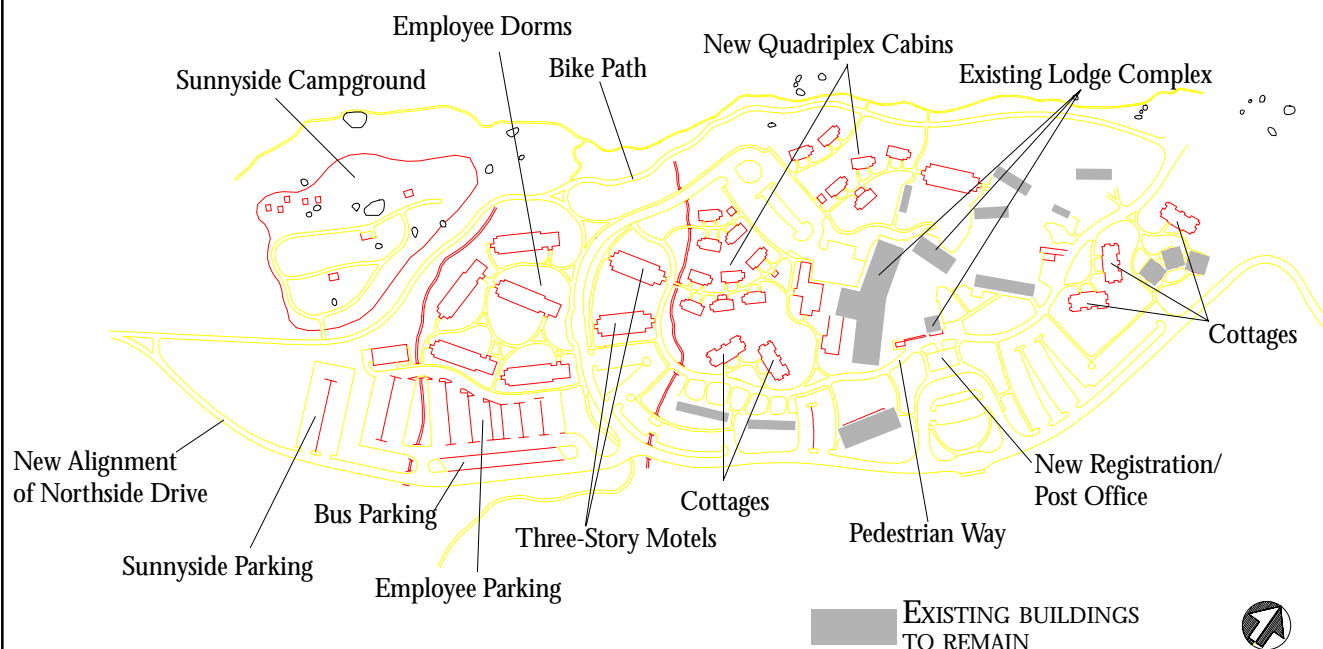
### ***Replacement of Gas Station***

### ***Scheduled for Removal October of 1997***

A gas station in Yosemite Valley was added to the alternatives in the Draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan, allowing the issue to be considered in the context of the future decision on day use vehicles.

## APPROVED COMPREHENSIVE SITE PLAN

### FOR YOSEMITE LODGE AREA



## Other Planning News:

### ***The Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan***

We are wrapping up changes to the alternatives that will be presented in the Draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan. We expect this draft plan will be released for public review in early Fall. As part of the public review we will be holding open houses and workshops in several locations.

### ***El Portal Road Improvement***

The Draft Environmental Assessment for the El Portal Road Improvements public review period closed on June 16. Since that time we have been analyzing comments and making modifications to the project. A decision on how to proceed with the project will be made by the end of August and we will let you know the status in upcoming newsletters. Under any scenario, El Portal road construction would not begin until December 1, 1997, and would stop during the Christmas to New Year's holidays (December 20 - January 4, 1998).

### ***Housing Plan***

All the comments submitted on the 1996 Draft Housing Plan/Supplemental EIS Addendum are being analyzed to clearly identify issues and concerns expressed by the public. In order to resolve issues and respond to comments and concerns, additional information and resource data will need to be gathered and we are working to do so. It is expected that the final plan will be completed by late fall or early winter.

### ***Flood Plain Mapping***

Following the flood we recognized that for some locations the previously developed flood hazard information was inaccurate. To protect public health and property, we are interested in using the most accurate information. We are working cooperatively with the US Army Corps of Engineers to obtain updated flood hazard information for the park and within the El Portal Administrative Site.



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